

St. George's Union
with kind regards from Mr. [unclear]
PARISH 13

MAPS AND OTHER MATTERS:

A LETTER

TO

THE PAROCHIAL AUTHORITIES

OF

The Parishes & Unions

OF

ST. GEORGE, SOUTHWARK, ST. SAVIOUR, ST. OLAVE,
AND BERMONDSEY.

BY

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LONDON:

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Price Three Pence.



To the Parochial Authorities of the Parishes and Unions of St. George, Southwark, St. Saviour, St. Olave, and Bermondsey.

GENTLEMEN,

WHEN I had the honour, last autumn, of attending your several Boards, as the Superintending Inspector appointed by the General Board of Health to explain and direct the measures considered necessary to prevent the spread of Cholera in your districts, I had the misfortune to differ with many of you in opinion as to the measures most calculated to effect that object, and with nearly all of you as to the propriety of the General Board of Health interfering to direct or control the exertions of your various local boards. In more than one case, summary legal proceedings had to be adopted before such an amount of acquiescence, in the directions of the General Board of Health, could be obtained, as was absolutely necessary to carry out in any degree their plans for the public safety.

Yet, notwithstanding the partly hostile character of my appearance amongst you, and the great indisposition which existed to receive me favourably as an officer of the General Board of Health, I found an universal desire existing to act for the best interests of the parishes which you represented, a high degree of intelligence and information in many individual members of your several boards, and an amount of personal courtesy towards myself, that greatly facilitated an intercourse which might have been, from first to last, difficult and unpleasant.

All these things convinced me, that how resolute soever was the opposition I met with, however ill-judged I might think it, and however I might deplore its consequences, it proceeded from motives which I could not but respect. I concluded that the independence which so steadily resisted any interference or dictation from without, would be no less active and determined in planning and executing all salutary measures from within; that the praiseworthy economy shown in resisting any inroads on the parochial funds, would be equally exerted in preventing to the utmost those burdens of pauperism, widowhood, and orphanage, which can be shown to depend in any degree upon preventible causes of sickness and mortality. In short, I felt a conviction that the gentlemen, whom I was then meeting as open opponents or unwilling allies of the Board of Health, would one day, when informed by argument and convinced by experience, become able and zealous sanitary reformers.

In the full persuasion that such are your capabilities and that such is your destiny, and with a sincere interest in the scenes of my sanitary labours, I beg your attention, while I lay before you for your consideration a few points of great interest to you, as guardians of the poor of your respective

parishes, as stewards of the parochial funds, and as being in the still more important and more delicate position of representing those great social interests, difficult to define, but generally understood, which are comprehended in the word 'Parish,'—a word found in every stage of England's glorious history, and one which, rightly understood, presents to the mind the idea of free men, joined together, in friendly mutual dependence, by local and social ties, for all the best and highest purposes of civilization.

With this view of the nature of a parish, I need not say how important I consider the functions, and how great the responsibilities, of those who are chosen from amongst their neighbours to administer its affairs, and to represent it in the great social system of which it forms a part. I need not say, either, with how much respect I address you, and for how much of your favourable reception of what I have to say I must feel dependent on your enlightened views and indulgent consideration.

I have said that we are united in parishes by local and social ties. And first of the local.—The importance of defining and of fixing on the minds of the inhabitants a knowledge of the exact boundaries of a Parish, has always been admitted. When reading and writing were rare accomplishments—when Church ceremonies, sermons, and ballads, with pictures, "the books of the unlearned," were the usual means of instruction, this knowledge was conveyed by the ceremony of beating the bounds.

But surely, not only should the boundaries of a Parish be accurately defined for legal purposes, but every Parishioner ought to have facilities for becoming acquainted with its local details. How few know how many houses it contains, or how many inhabitants; still fewer, what is the nature of its soil; how it is drained, or whether it is drained at all; how it is supplied with water, or with gas, that newly created necessity of town life, whose brilliant but unwholesome blaze seems to compensate to the citizen for the absence, or the expensiveness, of daylight. These things, however, should be within easy reach of all members of a Parish. In the present day the best way of conveying the information would obviously be by good maps. Yet incredible as it may appear, in not one of your Parishes did I find a creditable Parish Map. If such a valuable thing existed, it would surely have been in full use, when the epidemic which ravaged our land was destroying, sometimes, from five to ten persons within the compass of three times as many yards, when whole courts were abandoned, owing to the death of some, and the alarm of other inhabitants. When the very stringent measure of a medical visitation from house to house had been pronounced necessary by the first sanitary authorities in the

kingdom, no means existed by which I could calmly compare the districts in which the disease was raging with those which were comparatively, or indeed positively healthy. Now a good map would have enabled me to lay down the routes of the visitors to the best advantage, and to assist the over-tasked medical officers, instead of finding, as I often did to my sorrow, that these gentlemen were interfering with and impeding, rather than assisting, each other.

I must confess, however, for myself, and admit the full force of the excuse for you, that the absolute need of a good map never appeared to me so urgent at that time as it has done since, when, long after my official connexion with the Board of Health had ceased, I went over, for my own information, and that of others, the scenes of my former labours, with an interest which can be little appreciated except by those who practise an art like that of medicine, so full of doubts and of certainties, of knowledge and of ignorance, of hope and of despair.

Then it was, that, desiring to track the footsteps of the destroyer, and to learn what circumstances had appeared to invite, encourage, or avert his stay, and desiring, still more earnestly, to collect the vast amount of information which must be in the possession of my professional brethren—then it was that I found how sad a want is the want of a good map.

I have inquired very diligently whether such a map would be costly in its first construction, or in its being kept up, year by year, as changes may occur. I have gone through the process of noting down in a few districts the exact localities of deaths from cholera as recorded in the Registrar-General's Reports; so I can form a good notion of what is wanted for very different, though analogous purposes. To my surprise, I find that such a map was published in 1815, and that the engraved plates might be altered so as accurately to represent the features of the present day, at a cost of about 25*l.* for each parish. A guarantee to take fifty copies at 10*s.*, would ensure this map being completed in less than a month. Such a map would specify every house, with its number, every shed, every yard or court, every fence, wall, or boundary. It might easily, under careful inspection, be made to specify every drain, watercourse, sewer, cesspool, privy, and watercloset. If Parishes would supply gratuitously such accurate information of any changes that might have been made, as their own district surveyors must of necessity possess, those changes might be noted on the map, year by year, at an extraordinarily small expense. A copy, being filed every year, would become a most valuable register of the parochial *status*, and if executed, as it would be, on a scale uniform with those of other parishes, a most important national document. I sincerely hope that the parishes to which I have been placed in

a position to impart this information will claim the honour, and the advantage, of first acting on the suggestion.

The great mortality from cholera on the south side of the Thames is an undeniable fact. Much difference of opinion exists as to the causes on which it depended. Such a map would be an unquestionable indication of an honest desire to investigate those causes, by affording every facility for the observation and comparison which are needed to trace them.

Another of the parochial ties which are strictly local, is the state of the dwellings, and especially those of the working classes. By the working classes I mean, comprehensively, those who live by their labour, rather than their capital, and who are bound by circumstances to reside near the place of their occupation. These classes, therefore, will include, not only the labourer and the artizan, but the shopman, the clerk, the members of the professions: nay, the capitalist himself is indirectly interested, for he cannot remove his buildings, and his machinery and implements. But he has this advantage: he may move himself and his family from the seat of his capital; or he may transfer his capital to another place. But the working-man is bound to the neighbourhood of his work. How fit objects, then, for parochial care are the dwellings of the labouring classes. When cholera threatened London with its approach, no point was more clearly proved, or more strenuously insisted upon, than the absolute necessity of providing houses of refuge, to which the yet healthy families, or neighbours, of the sick, could be removed easily and promptly. Accumulated evidence proved that the disease had been absolutely extirpated by this plan. Whole villages had been removed from the sick, and not a fatal case had occurred after their removal, though there had been many deaths daily for some time previous. Yet no parish that I am acquainted with had any premises at its disposal for this purpose, nor was the measure ever found practicable. Surely a few houses might be fitted up as model lodging-houses by the parish authorities, and, being parish property, might be used for that or similar purposes, if wanted on an emergency. They would also, infallibly, have the permanent effect of raising and keeping up the standard of the dwellings inhabited by the working classes, who are now an easy prey to negligent or unprincipled owners of houses so unfit for human habitation that their being tenanted at all is disgraceful to those who have the power to provide a better class of houses. It is only to be explained by there being no escape for the occupants from the immediate neighbourhood, and no better dwellings to be found there within the compass of their means. Parochial house-property, then, I hold it to be the duty of Parish authorities to provide, and to bring to the highest possible standard of perfection.

Parochial almshouses for the decayed poor of good character, might be made a means of separating these from the worthless and degraded, and of encouraging the former, as well as of improving and regulating, by proper and special discipline, the latter.

A comprehensive system of cleansing, and removing of refuse, would produce most valuable results, if its administration were confided to a competent and responsible Parochial Officer, well-paid, and having his efficiency ensured by vigilant inspection and report. A small band of street orderlies have been proved capable of keeping the great thoroughfares of the West End, and other parts of London, in a state of cleanliness formerly supposed unattainable. The sweeping of crossings alone, by appointed persons, would abolish one form of mendicancy. If with these duties were combined those of watering, and if a small guard were always on duty in case of fire, enormous advantages might be secured at a very small expense.

And now to proceed to more complicated, but not less imperative social duties.

I am desirous to confine myself to those things which I know, of which I have arrived at a conviction that amounts to certainty, and which I can fearlessly recommend for your consideration and adoption.

The medical relief which you provide for your poor will remain a subject of incessant mortification and annoyance to yourselves and to your medical officers, so long as it is allowed to continue in its present irrational state. You are not, perhaps, to blame for the existence of that state; it has grown up gradually, and is the result of circumstances over which you have hitherto had but little control. But it is now quite time to look into it, and to amend it; and an honest and fearless resolution to do this will be attended with the best results.

I am not going to meddle with the amount of the salaries you give your medical officers. What that amount ought to be, can, I believe, never be settled, while the manner of paying them, and the nature of what you exact from them, remain as they are. Pay what you and they may agree upon, for services rendered. You will soon arrive at a correct judgment on this point, when the nature of those services shall have been defined and simplified. But first and foremost, give them the medicines they require to use. Provide medicines and dispensers for them. Let there be no stint and no waste. To illustrate the absurdity of the present mode of uniting the contract for medicine and attendance, I beg your patient attention to a short argument by analogy. It is admitted that wine and cordials are sometimes useful remedies. Let us suppose them the only ones, and that they differed greatly, as they really do, in their fitness for particular cases,

in their strength, and in their price. Now, try to make a contract with a publican, to supply your poor with wines and cordials at a fixed price per district, or per score, or hundred head, of pauper population. That seems absurd enough. But now add this fresh element in the contract; suppose the publican be made the judge of what wine, and what cordial, and how much of it, was good for each patient. What amount of faith in human disinterestedness would it require to make you believe that the publican decided fairly when to give Curaçoa or Champagne at 12s. a bottle, or gin at 2s. Now go on one step, and imagine that a publican did take your contract, in hopes of getting other custom. What a comfortable relation you and he and the sick poor would stand in to one another! Yet the difference between quinine at 16s. an ounce, and nitre, or oak bark, at a few pence a pound, is greater than this; and besides, it is not always easy to say which of the two is best fitted for the case. Fancy how the difficulty is increased when the decision is hampered by the cost of the drug to the prescriber.

Again, you are all sufficiently good judges of the amount of attention given to your sick poor; exact as much of that as you think fit. You are no judges of the treatment. Your medical officers would not object to being responsible for their practice to competent judges. Medical officers in the Army and Navy furnish reports to their superior officers cheerfully. They know them to be competent judges. Provide Inspectors, therefore, or Officers of Health. Such gentlemen would be the referees and judges between you and your medical officers. That would be a gain to all parties. They would also represent you, as to your parochial medical affairs, to the heads of the profession, whether to a public body, as the General Board of Health, or to those scientific Medical Societies whose influence is so great, and in which all medical men have a laudable ambition to be mentioned and distinguished.

Except isolated cases which have comparatively little value, and which are more effectually observed and treated in hospitals, your medical officers have, at present, little to communicate that can advance the course of medical science. Were their observations and experience grouped and recorded by others, every parish would furnish its valuable contingent of information on the most obscure but most important subjects. Epidemic disease, for instance, the circumstances which favour, or modify, or prevent it. Collected facts on this one subject, would save parishes thousands of pounds in preventible sickness and mortality, with their consequent pauperism, widowhood, and orphanage.

The details of plans by which these two benefits could be

secured—the supply of medicines at cost price, and the appointment of Medical Inspector or Health Officer, in each parish or district,—would be neither difficult to arrange, nor costly to execute. With these two matters settled, the top and bottom of the medical edifice planned, the middle part might be safely left to be filled in by any number of medical practitioners who might choose to undertake the duties and conform to your regulations. From among these the poor might choose their own attendants, with comfort to themselves, honour and credit to the practitioners, and satisfaction to you. As a measure of economy, I repeat, it would pay abundantly, and the Parish doctor would cease to be a last resource of the wretched, and his duties a constant subject of grievance to himself, and suspicion to you.

Self-supporting Dispensaries might adopt the same or similar machinery, and relieve you of the cost of the working man able and willing to provide medical attendance for himself, and fairly to remunerate his doctor. A parochial, as distinguished from a pauper, Infirmary, would be as easily added as parochial, not pauper, habitations, and would be a source of comfort and independence to the working classes in sickness.

I have but one more suggestion to add, for the perfecting your Parochial Society. Look upon your Board as your Parish Parliament. Get the best men you can find into it. Englishmen have the happy art of choosing their best men when they set resolutely about it. And the best men, in England, have the art of working when they are chosen.

Let the higher and more spiritual elements of society be represented at your Board. Invite the Clergy, and the Ministers of religion, of all denominations, to become members. Unite them with you and with each other in the common work of local usefulness. They will then find many points of mutual agreement and of mutual concession.

And now I must offer you my apologies for thus trespassing on your attention. I owe the will, and the power, to further the good ends which I have sketched out, to the mere circumstance of having enjoyed for a short time opportunities of extended observation on a few important matters; and I feel that I cannot better show my gratitude for those opportunities than by offering, for your consideration, the results which I have drawn from them, in the best manner which my humble abilities will allow.

Your obedient servant,

CHARLES R. WALSH.

HALF MOON STREET, PICCADILLY,

June, 1850.



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